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On Overthrowing Khadafy

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LIFE clearly isn't as simple as it used to be. Witness the ease with which Col. Khadafy romps and stomps about the globe — even unto



plotting the assassination of the President of the United States, along with such other U.S. officials as may come

within his cross-hairs.

Always the world has had its wild men, but formerly they were easier to deal with. For one thing their reach has become longer, given the wonders of modern travel and communications.

There is more to it even than this. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, the world's non-European trouble spots were policed by the great imperial powers, France and Britain, joined in latter years by the United States, which kept order in the Caribbean. It was the policemen's style to meet force with force, threat with threat, and this without obeisances to a pagan god not yet imagined — World Opinion.

This made things rough. If you were a quarrelsome despot, or the loyal retainer of one. On the other hand, if you were a citizen of a civilized, law-abiding nation, it was pleasant to know that behind you stood the armed might of Europe and America.

Seventy or 80 years ago, the Great Powers would have known what to do with Khadafy. They would have put their troops ashore in Libya and deposed him.

It won't happen today, though it should. The deponents would be condemned at the United Nations, and pro-Khadafy peace marches would erupt in world capitals. Anthony Lewis and Mary McGrory would fulminate.

Even worse, the world's sole remaining imperial power, the Soviet Union, would threaten nuclear war over so pale an imitation of the invasion of Afghanistan.

Yet when all's said, it behooves the West to work determinedly and expeditiously to effect Khadafy's overthrow. The colonel, as boss of far-ranging assassination squads, as paymaster of Palestinian terrorists, as inveterate meddler in all his neighbors' business, and lately as promoter of a Libyan nuclear capability, is a danger to world peace and stability, such as they are. If it is injudicious to land troops in Libya, there are other ways, and they should be pursued.

Principally the civilized world needs to boycott Libyan oil, upon which the country's tenuous economy depends. Already this year purchases of Libyan oil have shrunk by two-thirds, thanks to Khadafy's adamance over charging the world's highest prices at a time of glut and falling consumption. Still, from January to June,

Libya was America's third-largest foreign oil supplier, after Saudi Arabia and Nigeria.

This should stop at once. Libya, a poor country, desperately needs the foreign exchange it earns from oil. As prosperity disappears, internal resistance to Khadafy will swell. A more general boycott, involving all goods sold to or bought from Libya, would naturally hurt even worse.

Meantime the CIA, assuming it still knows how, should aid and abet resistance to Khadafy. I know, I know — this is the sort of thing we forswore in the mid-70s under the goading of the Church committee.

What a mistake was the forswearing! The CIA's folly in the old days was frivolous plotting in frivolous causes, such as devising ways to make Castro's beard fall out.

But bad plots cannot discredit virtuous ones — those that rescue or bolster the peace of the world. A CIA plot against Hitler (had there been a CIA then, and had it been interested) would have amounted to a public service.

Khadafy is not Hitler, but his endless capers menace a dangerously unstable world. Under the mad colonel, Libya is a ticking bomb. What do we do, pray that it fails to go off — or seek to disarm it?

Neither course is guaranteed to prove fruitful. But of the two, only one is farsighted, only one is resolute, only one is courageous.